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ORIGINAL PAPER

Musical Naturalism in the Thought of JI Kang

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Abstract Wei-Jin period is characterized by neo-Daoism (*xuanxue* 玄學), and JI Kang lived in the midst of this philosophical exploration. Adopting the naturalism of the *Zhuangzi*, JI Kang expressed his socio-political concerns through the medium of music, which was previously regarded as having moral bearing and rectitude. Denying such rectitude became central for JI Kang, who claimed that music was incapable of possessing human emotion, releasing it from the chains of Confucian ritualism. His investigation into the name and reality of musical expression gave music an "aesthetic turn" lacking in Qin and early Han thought, and by making use of concepts such as natural harmony and spontaneity, JI Kang was able to turn away from the negative aesthetics of earlier thinkers such as HE Yan and WANG Bi to one cherishing the naturalism espoused by Zhuangzi.

Keywords JI Kang · *Xuanxue* · Musical aesthetics · Zhuangzi

One of the most readily apparent traits of post-Han philosophical thought in China was the rise of a group of intellectuals known for their discursive style of debate and profound esteem for things natural. Of these intellectuals, JI Kang 嵇康 (224-263CE),[1] whose inspiration was from the *Zhuangzi* but whose treatises mainly deal with Confucian themes, especially musical theory, stands out for his lucid writing style and exceptional skill at argumentation.[2] His works are characteristic of the "metaphysical turn" (*xuanxue* 玄學) that occurred during the late Wei 魏 and early Jin 晉 Dynasties, but what is more, his reverence

[1]JI Kang's writings (originally consisting of 15 *juan* 卷, of which 1 *juan* of poetry and 9 *juan* of essays are still extant) survive in the *Collected Writings of JI Kang* 嵇康集, also known as the *Collected Writings of JI Zhongsan* 嵇中散集. Page numbers cited throughout this essay refer to DAI Mingyang's 戴明揚 edited text, *Collected and Annotated Commentaries on JI Kang* 嵇康集校注.

[2]For more on JI Kang's life and writings, see the introduction to Robert Henricks's text, *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of JI Kang*; Ronald Egan's article, "The Controversy over Music and 'Sadness' and Changing Conceptions of the Qin in Middle Period China," as well as ZHANG Huihui's 張蕙慧 text, *Research into JI Kang's Musical Aesthetic Thought*.

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for naturalism as a means of expounding his musical aesthetics marked a decisive shift in the philosophical interests of the literati from the ontology of non-Being (*guiwu* 貴無) for He Yan 何晏 (193-249 CE) and Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249 CE) toward one of Being (*chong you* 崇有) for Pei Wei 裴頠 (267-300 CE) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312 CE). Such a decided favouring of Daoist thought for guidance on how to make sense of the new world order in the third and fourth centuries was due not only to the collapse of the Han empire but perhaps was primarily a direct response to the ensuing chaos.[3] For Ji Kang, following nature served as a means to cultivate one's life; also he elevated music from the functional realm of ritual to that of ontology by disavowing its traditional role as a transmitter of human emotion. Denying music its ability to both convey the emotional state of mind of the performer while transferring said state onto the listener was, for Ji Kang, achieved by endowing music with a triadic set of properties—an essence comprised of formless, non-constant sound; a sense of harmony that accords with natural principle; and an intermediary agent in the form of "presence of mind."[4] Having such tools at his disposal, Ji Kang was thereby able to rid music of any sense of inherent emotionalism and liberate it from the chains of Han feudalism.

Ji Kang's most famous treatise, "Sound is Without Grief or Joy" (*Sheng wu Aile Lun* 聲無哀樂論)[5] deals precisely with the question of music and harmony but addresses it from an onto-aesthetic perspective. Music, therefore, was transformed from a morally subjective experience into an immersion of nature, while its aesthetics evolved from an unsophisticated appreciation of the beauty of music as a disinterested interaction between performer and listener, into a rich, multi-spectral appreciation of the musical beauty of music, in which there exists not only a linkage between listener and performer, but also one in which the listener becomes a participant in the compositional actualization of the piece being performed. Having such an objectivistic understanding of music was not only a radical move by Ji Kang, but it also revolutionized the way music was conceptualized and put to use. We shall, therefore, investigate the musical argumentation of Ji Kang on three levels: on the aesthetic level, the stylistic composition of *Shenglun* is most interesting, employing a dialogue between two interlocutors in a manner reminiscent of the early Greeks; on a second level as a counter to the *Yue Ji* 樂記 chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記); and finally, as espousing the naturalism of the *Zhuangzi*, whose world-outlook and reluctance to hold in esteem traditional institutional norms is supported by Ji Kang, a devout follower of the text.[6] From these three levels of investigation, we can arrive at three subsequent, yet complementary, operations: the aesthetic level reveals the operation of natural principle (*ziran zhi li* 自然之理); on the social level we arrive at the operation of psychological sensibility; and on the level of naturalism, we witness the operation of practical knowledge. To this end, this article shall not only investigate the multifaceted nature of Ji Kang's musical philosophy, but shall also endeavour to bring to light its more metaphysical strands in order to show its reverence for the epistemological thought of Daoism, while at the same time it also attempts to resolve the perceived discontinuity between its aesthetic, psychological, and empirical modes of operation.

[3] Indeed, it was due to the lewd behavior of the "seven sages of the bamboo grove," of which Ji Kang was a member, that forced later *xuanxue* thinkers such as Pei Wei to launch vicious attacks in defence of Confucian ethical norms.

[4] The term *pinghe* 平和, which I translate literally as "peace and harmony" but whose meaning is more in line with equanimity, or "presence of mind," appears only four times throughout the entire essay, all of which occur in the fifth section (see Dai 1962: 124; 126; 127).

[5] Hereafter referred to as *Shenglun*.

[6] The three texts held in esteem by all *xuanxue* thinkers are the *Zhouyi* 周易, the *Laozi* 老子, and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.

1 Preliminary Observations[7]

Shenglun adopts the *qingtan* 清談 style of debate, pitting a "Guest from Qin" (*qinke* 秦客, a Confucian) against the "Host of the Eastern Wilds" (*dongye zhuren* 東野主人, said to be Jɪ Kang himself) in a debate on the inherent emotional nature of music. The entire text is divided into eight sections with the Host responding to the Guest's queries or statements. From the outset, the Guest raises what will become the central theme and problem of this debate: the inherent ability of music to transform social customs while influencing the hearts and minds of people through an emotional transference from performer to listener:

> I have heard it previously said in discussions that "the music of a kingdom that is well-ordered is peaceful and joyous; that of a state in peril is grievous and longing." The orderliness or chaos of a kingdom depends upon its government and its music reflects this; thus, feelings of grief and longing are expressed in metal and stone while those of peace and joy take shape in the pipes and strings. When Confucius heard the *Shao*, he knew of the virtue of Shun, while Jɪ Zha would know the customs of all of the states by listening to the Odes. These matters have already come to be and were not questioned by scholars of the past. Today, you alone believe that sound has neither grief nor joy. Why is this so? (Dai 1962: 196–97)

Following this opening attack, the Host refutes one after another the grounds upon which the Guest's arguments lie, believing that they are derived from the "absurd records of vulgar scholars" in order to "swindle later generations" by giving credence to their tradition (Confucianism). Although the Host does not openly declare the traditional musical understanding of the Guest to be illogical, he does say that given the argumentative context in which they are debating (3rd century China), such argumentative reasoning is inadequate (to counter the Host's metaphysical naturalism). This imbalance not only illustrates the complexity of the problem Jɪ Kang was attempting to address but also the strong resistance to change he felt both within himself (as the interlocutor of both sides of the debate) and from society at large (hence his offering of both traditional Confucian arguments and their dismissal by way of neo-Daoist metaphysics). Furthermore, the Host quite critically points out that "in order to make classifications and discriminate amongst things, one must first seek out their natural principle (*ziran zhi li* 自然之理), and once it has been obtained, one can then try to use the past to illuminate the ideas of the present" and that one should not "rely on the words of former times as a means to authenticate one's remarks" (Dai 1962: 204). This is to believe that in knowing things one cannot be excluded from reaching self-attainment which would otherwise lead to a sole reliance upon the words and deeds of former times, but one must first seek out natural principles in order to approach things objectively while also understanding the laws of existence and respecting each object's inherent characteristics. Using this methodology, the Host is thereby able to refute the Guest's arguments, and Jɪ Kang himself is able to defend his thesis that music lacks the emotions of grief and joy.

But what, then, is the natural principle of music? The Host says:

> When heaven and earth combined their virtues, the myriad things were born and prospered. Cold and hot came and went in succession and thus the five elements were created. These elements in turn were expressed as the five colors and sent forth in accordance with the five sounds (tones). The emergence of music resembles the

[7] For an alternate reading on the eight sections of *Shenglun*, see Zhang 1997: 30–36.

> scents and odors found in the world. Their quality is good or bad, yet even in a chaotic world, their essence remains constant. How could love or hate alter the tune, and grief or joy alter the tempo? (Dai 1962: 197)

The Host subscribes to the belief that heaven and earth give rise to the myriad things, and as music is one of these, it also follows the *dao* of nature, the vital breath of heaven and earth, and yet it alone is between heaven and earth, having its own inherent natural qualities and cannot possibly be altered by grief or joy. Beginning from this point, we can not only summarize the Host's particular position but also make some general observations regarding Ji Kang's overall position on music as a tool for reforming social conventions despite its lacking any emotional framework.

The first observation to be made is about the statements "harmonious sound is formless" (*hesheng wu xiang* 和聲無象) and "sound lacks constancy" (*yinsheng wu chang* 音聲無常), both of which point to two types of phenomena and both of which reveal Ji Kang's reverence for Daoist naturalism. The idea that sound is formless is in fact a discussion on the dynamic relationship between name and reality. Both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* take up this issue, and here Ji Kang extends it from its original onto-epistemological context to that of musical aesthetics.[8] The Guest takes up the argument by using the analogy that one refers to crying as a sign of grief and singing or laughter as a sign of joy even though the reality in which these acts occur are different. This would seem rather straightforward, yet the Host concludes that the name (grief or joy) may not be applicable to its reality for it is entirely feasible that a crying person might be in a state of joy, while he who breaks out in song might in fact be tormented with grief. Thus, Ji Kang's adoption of a relativistic position when it comes to labelling manifested phenomena would not have come as a surprise to followers of either Laozi or Zhuangzi, but his application of such subjectivism to the field of music most certainly would have been.

The second phenomenon regards the ubiquitous nature of emotion. When guests fill a banquet hall, there will be drinking and merriment. Indeed, some of the guests listening to the *qin* 琴 will feel happy and laugh, while others will feel disheartened and cry. Although listening to the same piece of music, people of different dispositions will naturally display different emotions. From these occurrences, the Host raises the notions of "harmonious sound is formless" and "sound lacks constancy," believing that sound (*sheng* 聲) cannot be used to express fixed emotions, and its relationship with emotion is one in which constancy is lacking (*wuchang* 無常). Ji Kang is not denying the existence of an emotional response to music but believes that "grief and joy, because of external matters, are naturally composed in the heart first whereas harmonious sounds arise spontaneously and are sent forth" (Dai 1962: 204), which is to say, emotional responses do not have it within their natural means to occur after listening to sounds or music, but it is because of external factors that such emotions are able to take hold internally only later to be released in accordance with harmonious sounds (*he xie* 和諧). Therefore, he states that "the stimulation of men's hearts by harmony is very much like the effect that wine has on one's emotions" (Dai 1962: 204). Sound and wine, then, essentially serve the same purpose: they both act as triggers for the release of emotions that are already formed within the heart and cannot in themselves be used to create feelings of grief and joy.

Regarding the natural harmony of sound, the Guest from Qin not only believes that sound can express emotions of grief and joy, but also that it can be divided into both

[8] Susan Langer points out that the difficulty in finding a solution to the name-reality dilemma lies in the recognition that what art expresses is not actual feeling, but ideas of feeling; language does not express actual things and events but ideas of them (see Langer 1953: 59).

grievous and joyful categories. The Host, on the other hand, is of the opinion that "sounds possess a natural harmony and have no relation to human emotion" (Dai 1962: 208). Sound does not in and of itself possess the emotions of grief or joy, nor is it capable of distinguishing emotions that are grievous or joyful, for it can only be characterized using one-to-one relationships such as great and small, simple and complex, and so on. What is common to sound, however, is harmony—not on a musical level but one derived from the nature of the universe (by way of the forces of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽) and is thus immune to change on the psychological level of human emotion. Put another way, Ji Kang's conception of harmony places it within the realm of *dao* 道 where it is unaffected by external conditions that might influence its internal characteristics, such that it is left to its own devices, following natural principle (*ziran zhi li* 自然之理) in order to attain a state of natural harmony (*ziran zhi he* 自然之和) and balance amongst its constituent parts.[9] Music is a conglomeration of individual harmonies that in their unison form a total harmony. If, as the Guest claims, music carries emotional qualities, wherein would one find the emotions of joy or grief? Assigning emotional qualities to one set of harmonies but not to another would result in overall disharmony, confusing and agitating the listener; thus, there must exist a balancing of harmonies so that an overarching unity of harmony (*he xie* 和諧) results, and this can only occur if music is exclusionary of emotion.

The next point that can be observed regards the Host's statement that "sound takes presence of mind as its substance" (*shengyin yi pinghe wei ti* 聲音以平和為體). This is a view not dissimilar to that of Zhuangzi: when the world is harmonious, an emotional richness and depth to affairs becomes apparent, which is fulfilled in an equally harmonious air of expression or exteriorization. Only after the world has entered the realm of harmony (*he xie* 和諧) can harmony in music occur. What is called presence of mind (*pinghe* 平和), then, is to be without preference for grief or joy, to not be exclusionary of these core emotions but, rather, to transcend the level of distinction in which feelings of grief or joy take place. Taking what is harmonious (*he* 和) to be a social harmony facilitated by harmonious sounds (*he sheng* 和聲), presence of mind (*ping he* 平和), on the other hand, represents a state of mind that is nurtured by the harmony existing *within* music. From this, we can regard the Host as having a romantic naturalism—a longing for the time when the world lived in a state of tranquil non-deliberation, when human heart was by nature balanced, unaware of the feelings we refer to today as grief and joy. Being both griefless and joyless is in fact a characteristic of *dao*, since *dao* gives man his natural emotions; the same should also be said about the essential characteristic of music: hence Ji Kang claims that "sound takes presence of mind as its substance."[10]

The notion that "agitation and quietude are the effects of music" is the fourth key point made by Ji Kang. In the words of the Host, sound can be interpreted only as either soothing or painful and as people listen to such sound and/or music, they will have only an agitated or quiet response. Because sound has no attributes of grief or joy, "emotions that alter together with the song are isolated from the realm of harmony…. How can one discover grief and joy in its midst?" (Dai 1962: 216). This notion is repeated throughout the debate

[9] As Ludwig van Beethoven said, "Music gives the mind a relation to the [total] harmony. Any single, separate idea has in it the feeling of the harmony, which is Unity" (cited in Langer 1953: 131).

[10] This can be contrasted with a typically Western perception of music as "bearing close similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses—not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt.... Music is therefore a tonal analogue of emotive life" (Langer 1953: 27).

and is supported by the argument that feelings are internally pre-existent; there can be no consideration permitted for the possibility of emotive transference from object to subject, for such a state can only exist in the song itself and not in the listener. This is a counter to the Guest's claim that when one's inward feelings change, they are appropriately reflected in one's outward constitution through a process of manifestation that begins with one's *qi* 氣, proceeds to one's heart, and is then expressed as an outward display of either grief or joy. Ji Kang objects to such a simplistic rendering, arguing that music exists as a separate realm from the objectified human world. Its capacity is not to influence the emotional state of the mind (the task of presence of mind) but to provide it, via harmony (*he xie* 和諧), with a situation favourable for cathartic release. This is reminiscent of Eduard Hanslick's concept of "sounding forms in motion,"[11] which is really no different from Ji Kang's harmony in that both take such operations to be the essence of music, and yet both concepts are susceptible to misinterpretation precisely because of their hidden nature.

The final preliminary point to be made regarding Ji Kang's musical treatise is his belief that music is in need of additional control. Ji Kang believes both that music is "the greatest desire of man's mind, what the feelings and desires crave," and that "feelings cannot be left unchecked and desires cannot be allowed to reach the limit" (Dai 1962: 197), for to do so would lead to the enslavement of men by their own emotional indulgences. Harmonious music can free men from such chains by providing them with a sense of beauty and joy, but a beauty that is itself restrained to prevent them from succumbing to their desirous wants. In addition to the regulatory value music plays, Ji Kang also firmly believes in the need for music to distinguish its excesses. Sound that is good or proper is controlled not only by harmony but also by one's presence of mind which is used to "create music that can lead and guide" such that it may transform social traditions and even practical knowledge. Music whose sound is excessive lacks presence of mind, having only harmony; therefore, with changes that are endless, it will make men suspicious and confused, precluding it from bringing about social change.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Ji Kang views music as one of the myriad things borne out of the harmonious realm of heaven and earth. The objective existence of music has no direct connection to the subjective emotions of humans; unable to express emotion in and of itself, music is unable to arouse any corresponding emotions, acting as nothing more than an acoustic stimulation, whose response in the listener can be no more than a reflection of the agitation or quiescence already present in his mind.

2 *Sheng Wu Aile Lun*'s Argumentative Division

To further elucidate our discussion of Ji Kang's musical inquiry, a general overview of the structure and argument presented in *Shenglun* would be beneficial. The essay begins with an introductory account of how well-ordered states reveal their gaiety through music that is performed using wind and string instruments, for their sounds are light and colorful, while a state whose affairs are in chaos plays music that is sombre and melancholic, using bronze bells and stone chimes.[12] Thus, the Guest begins the debate by recounting the traditional

[11] What is meant by "sounding forms in motion" is that "the motion of (invisible) musical forms are given to the ear rather than to the eye (as we see with other forms of art) causing people to listen for the wrong things and to assume that to understand music one must not simply know of music but rather, one must know much about music" (see Langer 1953: 107).

[12] The relationship between music and state affairs comes from the *Book of Poetry* 詩經. See Legge 1994: 34.

Confucian understanding of musical production as one of two outlets: festive or ritual accompaniment. Being festive, it necessarily induces a festive spirit; being sombre, it necessarily induces a spirit of melancholy. It has been so since the late-Shang without exception, hence the Guest's belief that music embodies the emotions of joy and sorrow. The Host's response throws the Guest off guard completely by making use of a cosmological argument taken from the School of Yin-Yang and the *Zhuangzi*, in which it is said that the myriad things of the universe arise because of the transformations of *yin-yang* and *qi* 氣, thus leading to the formation of the five elements, colors, and notes. Since these are all natural processes, and sound is itself naturally determined, it lacks constancy and remains unaffected by human emotion.[13] However, as the Host rightly points out, different regions have different customs, and so one cannot make a definitive claim that crying is due solely to grief, nor singing to the manifestation of joy. The multitude of musical possibility cannot be expressed through any single emotion, nor can we accurately attach to it a description; because of this inconstancy, music is unrelated to emotion. The only means through which music and emotion may come together is by way of harmony, which represents nothing in itself, but serves to release emotions already present in the mind. This is the crux of Ji Kang's argument and the topic of the opening round of the debate. Internal and outward expressions have their own purpose whereby the outward is arbitrarily assigned, leaving the internal constant and true.

The second round of arguments sees the Guest questioning the Host's claim to regional difference. For the Guest, emotion is what moves the heart; thus music is derived from emotional stimulation, the result of which is a plethora of sounds that the skilled listener is able to discern. Hence, Zi Qi can know the nature of Bo Ya's heart by listening intently to his strumming of the lute. If one has a heart heavy with worry, it will be displayed by a change in one's facial coloration or expression, just as sound reflects one's feelings of grief or pain. These are natural manifestations and cannot be concealed, and so, the Guest argues, one cannot claim to have never met someone who listens to music but says such music is unknowable. Music has its purpose just as emotions have theirs. From this, sound gives one grief; notes give one joy. The reality of this cannot be otherwise, and this is why the Guest maintains the point that music contains the emotions of grief and joy. This argument is a reversal of the Host's use of Zhuangzi's argument over the reality of names and the relativistic nature of language. One might go so far as to call the Guest a realist; what is outwardly visible is therefore taken to be a truthful representation of one's inner disposition. As we shall see, however, the Host dispels this theory by revealing the disingenuous nature of emotional manifestation.

As the Host goes about refuting the Guest's second line of attack, he additionally questions his claim that singing and crying may be expressed in myriad forms but people who are skilled at listening will naturally comprehend its intention. For Ji Kang, the inability to decipher different emotional states based solely on the music being played is due to the question of sincerity. How can one know that another is inwardly sad if outwardly he is laughing and dancing, for he who feigns happiness may in fact be inwardly lamenting. The Guest's claim that such people are incapable of masking their inner emotions is therefore called into doubt, for such people are merely fooling others with false emotional displays. As music does not embody the reality of the situation, it follows that any encounter with music cannot be equated with an equivalent change in emotive

[13] All told, there are eight emotions: love, hatred, grief, joy, anger, gaiety, shame, and fear. Ji Kang believes that the cardinal emotions of grief and joy are the only ones capable of being expressed in music.

constituency; the inconsistent nature of music cannot possibly instill in the listening subject a consistent emotional state such as grief or joy, nor can its emotional qualities at the time of inception be comprehended by later generations. The implication of this shocking statement, a statement denying the moral authority of Confucius himself, forces the Guest to change tactics, now claiming that the average person is indeed incapable of comprehending music, but it now takes one who possesses a "spirit-like insight" (*shen ming* 神明) to be able to interpret the music of former times (Dai 1962: 201). The distinction being made here is a psychological one. The release of emotion is separate from the production of emotion; neither can fully embody the other, nor should we equate the name of the thing with the reality of its being.[14] To say one can know the minds and customs of the people of high antiquity simply by listening to their music seems preposterous to the Host, yet this is precisely the traditional understanding that the Guest is attempting to defend.[15]

The Guest continues his discussion from the previous section, saying that as emotional change is internal, there must be an equivalent external expression. Here, however, the body enters the equation as the medium through which emotion and music find their alignment, thus turning the debate from one that is psychological into one that is metaphysical. Given that human emotions experience peaks and ebbs and are released through external stimuli, just as sound has notes that are high and low, tones that are strong and weak, the Guest makes a case by saying, "If happiness and anger reveal themselves through one's complexion and appearance, then grief and joy should also appear in his music" (Dai 1962: 205). This claim that music is somehow inherent or internalized by the body is ignored by the Host, who prefers to shift the emphasis of their discussion toward the harmonic naturalness characteristic of the *Zhuangzi*. Whether one eats spicy food or is blinded by smoke, the outcome in both cases will be teary eyes. In one case, the result is joyful, while in the other it is painful, but we cannot say that tears of joy are sweet, while those of pain are bitter. Why is this? Sweat and tears are both produced by the body, yet neither embodies grief and joy, so why should this be the case with sound? At this point, Ji Kang introduces the notion of Perfect Harmony (*zhihe* 至和), the embodiment of nature itself as expressed through the sage. Since nature is devoid of emotion, being a transmission of the breath of the universe (*qi* 氣), how is music able to come into possession of human emotion? What we see, then, is the enactment of natural principle; there is no distinction between natural sounds and sounds produced by humanity. The laws of nature bind any aural manifestation and because of this, music is incapable of acting as a carrier for human emotion. The differentiation is thus made between effective and affective music; the highest form of music (*zhi yue* 至樂) does not influence the emotional bearing of the subject, while the sage (*zhi ren* 至人) remains emotionally unaffected. Thus, music that occurs in the natural world (in its pure form as sound) will most certainly establish a relationship with the myriad things, with which it coexists, while music that transcends the mundane world of humans exists on an ontological level that only the sage is capable of comprehending.

At the mid-point of the debate, Ji Kang provides the Guest with an opportunity to inquire once again why music has neither grief nor joy. The Host's response forms one of the

[14] This refers to a discussion on name and reality and the oneness of all beings found in Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*.

[15] Ji Kang surely had in mind the story of Wheelwright Pian at the end of Chapter 13 when he wrote this, for the similarities are uncanny. In that tale, the wheelwright says of Duke Huan's books of old that they are nothing but the chaff and dregs of the men who wrote them and are therefore of little use in understanding their original state of mind. For Ji Kang, the temporal transference of emotion is no different.

longest sections of the text, returning to his discussion on the theme of language and reality seen in section two. In a rather circular manner, the Host makes the claim that a person's intentions cannot be adequately expressed in language which, in and of itself, is inadequately equipped to authenticate them.[16] As language is naturally determined but that regional locations and customs differ, the same object is frequently given different designations; hence, the human assignment of names to objects is conducted without consideration of regional variation or objectified characterization. The transposition of the songs of Chu 楚 into the state of Jin 晉 is yet another of the Guest's flawed arguments. Wind is without form but is still capable of producing sound.[17] The sound of the wind and the *pipa* are not the same, and upon inspecting the location in which the *pipa*'s sound is produced to that of the wind of Chu, there can be no correlation. Wind may be ubiquitous, but the sounds produced in each region are unique. The instruments used to create music might be physically the same, but the breath used to produce such music is not. Owing to this fact, how could someone from Jin possibly understand the songs of Chu? Jɪ Kang, via the Host, is not denying that music from one locale cannot be appreciated in another, nor that such music will fail to elicit any emotional response; rather, it is the state of mind that is at issue here. Psychologically, it is not possible to know the mind of the composer or performer of a piece of music, unless one is able to merge with such music by way of his presence of mind. This is the only option available to Jɪ Kang, if he wants to deny the Han loyalists their claim to moral legitimacy without denying them the right to continue their cultural heritage.

The Guest's argument for Section Five is as follows: those who listen to the sounds of the *zheng*, flute, and *pipa* will have a restless posture and an agitated mood; those who listen to the notes of the *qin* and *se* will have a tranquil posture and a carefree mood. Thus, in listening to different songs on the same instrument, one's feelings will change with the music. Therefore, music can possess either grief or joy. To this, the Host makes the following retort: because the *zheng*, flute, and *pipa* produce rapid, high notes, one's mood will become agitated. The *qin* and *se* produce long, low notes leading to a tranquil, relaxed mood. Thus, musical differentiation lies in having either a rapid or a slow rhythm; mood, as a response to music, is thus limited to either agitation or quietude. As grief and joy already exist in human hearts, one cannot make the claim that either an agitated or quiescent response implies that music itself is responsible for the arising of grief or joy. Music takes harmony as its root and has no normalcy to human emotions other than a dependency on such harmony for the arousal of its expression. The issue at stake, then, becomes what is the relationship between the movement induced by music and harmony, and whether such movement negates this harmony has no bearing upon it and does not serve to enhance it.

If we suppose that human emotions already exist in the heart, then a person who is happy upon hearing music that is tonally sad will still express emotions of delight, while someone who is distressed will still express emotions of despair. Music naturally contains emotions of grief and joy, the Guest claims; it is only slow in responding to emotional change and is thus unable to immediately reflect such changes or trigger emotions of an opposite nature. The Host responds to this slow reaction by using the analogy of fire. As a single torch will fail to warm a cold room, it will not, on the other hand, increase the cold. Fire is not used to increase the cold, just as music is not used to increase joy or grief. Only

[16] An allusion to Chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi*.

[17] See the story of the piping of the earth at the beginning of Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*.

joy can increase joy, and grief can add further grief; this is known as exhausting one's inner self.[18]

In the penultimate section, the Guest from Qin rejects the answer just given by the Host. Human hearts can only have joy and no grief; they only have grief and no joy. This is the cardinal principle of different emotions. Crying is the result of grief and laughter of joy. Therefore, the music of Qi 齊 and Chu 楚 are seen as taking sorrow as their root as all outward reactions to their music confirm. The Host rightly counters such logic with the observation that the degree in which grief and joy may be expressed is not equal; therefore, one sees only degrees of outward difference and cannot observe those that are internal.

The concluding section shifts focus to what music relies upon in order to transform social traditions, and the answer is harmony. One must learn to use a harmonious mood to enrich one's inward condition and a harmonious atmosphere to give expression to one's inward condition; only then can one comprehend the Perfect Harmony (*zhi he* 至和) of music. Therefore, the social value of music lies not in its ritualistic propriety but as a psychologically engaging, metaphysically centered operation. Music's ability to transform society, therefore, rests in its facilitation by harmonious music, which in turn induces a state of mind in the people that is itself harmonious and balanced, one that nurtures and is nurtured by music.

3 The Relationship between Harmony and Presence of Mind

Perhaps Ji Kang's most important conceptual development in *Shenglun* is his belief that the essential nature of sound is harmony (*he* 和), while the characteristic tool of music is presence of mind (*pinghe* 平和). What becomes required of a person's natural character, then, if one is to be receptive to such sound, is a correspondingly harmonious spirit (*hexin* 和心). The task of music thus is to achieve a state of harmony with the subject's inner-being in order that it may sooths a state of grief or release feelings of joy. Music that lacks harmony will only fill the hearts of people with confusion and misfortune, rendering it unusable to change the prevailing habits and customs of a state while simultaneously discrediting its regulatory role in ritual ceremony. One must therefore learn to "distinguish the uprightness of the Ya 雅 from the lewdness of Zheng 郑" (Dai 1962: 207). That Ji Kang refers to the Ya (a collection of songs in the *Book of Poetry*) as being upright and music from Zheng as lewd indicates his criticism of the Confucian convention of music, in which music should be strictly regulated and its notes formally aligned in conjunction with the ritual at hand. Ji Kang is claiming that such music should be regarded as "disharmonious" for it disregards natural harmony (presence of mind) out of fear of being labelled "lewd," when in fact such lewd music is more authentic precisely because it does not adhere to social conventions regarding the regulation of tempo or tone. Thus, we see yet again in Ji Kang's thought an adherence to Daoist principles of universal harmony through quiet non-deliberation (*wuwei* 無爲) as seen in Laozi's notion that "the highest note cannot be heard" and Zhuangzi's preference for "patterning oneself after heaven." For this reason, many scholars are uncertain whether to describe Ji Kang's aesthetics as essentially Confucian or Daoist, a condition we can attribute to the intellectual transition of the literati from late Han orthodoxy to the metaphysical investigations of *xuanxue* during the Wei and early Jin.

Shenglun further delves into the special character of music by questioning its capacity for expression in a manner that at the same time explores the nature of musical aesthetics. It

[18] This term is also used in the last line of Chapter 3 of the *Zhuangzi*.

takes sound (*sheng* 聲) as being equivalent to the sounds of nature, having no capacity of mind. In its essence, music is devoid of everything other than the sound that it transmits, and this process of transmission is neither one of transformation into an ethical agent, nor one of transplantation in which the subject comes to embody the inherent emotional qualities ascribed to its object. Such a radical re-description of music is in direct countermand to that laid out in the *Yueji* 樂記 chapter of the *Book of Rites*:

> Music arises from movement within [the mind], while ritual results from movement without [the body]. In coming from within, music leads to quietude [of mind]. In coming from without, ritual produces refinement [of body]. Great music is thus [characterized by its] ease, while great ritual is thus [characterized by its] simplicity. (*Liji*: 1086)

Thus, in countering the traditional perception of music as being subjected to the conditions of the mind, Ji Kang does not deny that music bears no influence upon human emotion; rather, he believes that, due to its inherent restless nature, music cannot embody the emotions of grief or joy but may only possess musical sounds (*yue yin* 樂音), tonal coloration (*yin se* 音色), harmonious notes (*he yin* 和音), and other universal, non-subjectivist properties.[19] Allowing musical sounds to be exclusive of emotion, Ji Kang remolds his listener in a passive light through which he may now regard music not as the source of emotional arousing but as the means through which acoustical sound (*yin xiang* 音響) itself achieves movement by way of the listener's response. On this, *Shenglun* was the first text to systematically develop an aesthetic theory of music that was neither ethically grounded nor centered upon the invocation of religious ritual.

Of the many parallels between Ji Kang's musical thought and that of the Daoists, one prominent distinction remains. Although Ji Kang took the production of sound and music as essentially a natural phenomenon, he did not go as far as some of his contemporaries in exerting the metaphysical nature of music (for example, Wang Bi's use of nothingness, *wu* 無, as a descriptive for *dao*). For Wang Bi, music that is manifest is not its ultimate realization; there still exists an original music—a soundless music (*wu yue* 無樂). Ji Kang refers to this original music as *zhiyue* 至樂, but it is not original in the sense that Wang Bi understood it. Ji Kang envisioned original music as having attained the ultimate level of perfectibility (*zhihe* 至和). No music is, therefore, able to lie beyond the differentiation of the five notes just as no emotion is able to go beyond the five colors and scents as an expressive modality. Thus, Ji Kang's reverence for nature is reflected in his privileging of natural sound as the preeminent expression of musical harmony and whose non-musical elements take up the emotional weight inherently missing in music.

Returning to an earlier argument of the Guest's on the need for spirit-like insight in order to fully comprehend the essential harmonic nature of music, we can now re-examine such a statement in lieu of Wang Bi's appropriation of nothingness. Confucians, much like the Guest from Qin, tend to view music in a formalistic light, as being sensory-deprived; hence the need for other forms of accompaniment (such as, dance, poetry, and song). Ji Kang, however, can be said to look at music as his mentor, Zhuangzi, would—as a sensory-rich experience, whose temporal manifestations are as boundless and beautiful as what occurs in the natural world. One might go further and say that for Ji Kang, listening to music is not

[19] There is a similar expression in Chapter 12 of the *Laozi*.

merely a physical experience but should also be thought of as an exercise in mental awareness, as Susan Langer so eloquently says:

> What we miss by inattentive hearing is the logical connectedness of the tonal sequence. We have no clear awareness of what has passed and therefore no impression of melodic or harmonic development…. [C]onsequently, in what one might call purely physical listening…we hear succession rather than progression, and miss all subordinate melody…. [However] for mental hearing…those tonal properties which are most definitely given to the physical ear, are the very ones that may be quite vague or even completely lacking to the inward ear. (Langer 1953: 136–37)

In other words, we are inattentive listeners, incapable of using our inner ear (the harmonious mind) to hear the true beauty of the sounds being sent forth before us.

This might be owing to what Ronald Egan terms "a disjunction" existing between the musical mind of the musician and the music currently being played; they are distinct and unrelated, one external and one internal (Egan 1997: 17). We see Ji Kang's epistemology carried further, to his classification of emotion and mood (*qing* 情). If attaining the proper presence of mind is the only means by which one can truly experience emotion, then in order to undergo an experience of feeling one merely needs harmony. Relying upon harmony and nothing else is to believe that "music contains reality within itself," a false precept, according to Ji Kang, for "harmonious sounds spontaneously manifest themselves and are released" (Dai 1962: 204). This would explain why Ji Kang reserves the right to encounter true emotion exclusively for the sage, for only he possesses enough self-restraint and presence of mind not to be seduced into emotional relapse or suffering. Such is the difference between the sage and common people on an epistemological level. The disjunction that Egan speaks of also exists on an ontological level: "As all sounds are sent forth from the same body, why should they alone contain the principles of grief and joy?" (Dai 1962: 208). Ontologically, sound distinguishes itself from music due to it being a propagation of *dao*. One nurtures *dao* by cultivating one's virtue, in the same way as one develops presence of mind and the ability to partake in Perfect Harmony by mastering and refining one's means to engage in feeling. Put another way, feeling may be ubiquitous to musical experience but the same cannot be said of emotion, whose mode of operation limits its accessibility to those who have obtained both harmony and presence of mind.

Practically speaking, Ji Kang's *Sound is without Grief or Joy* is not so much an attack on the rigid conceptualization of music in the *Book of Rites* as it is on the ignorance of the intelligentsia to all that lies beyond the traditional outlook of music espoused therein:

> The variations of notes arise from human minds. The actions of human minds are due to things [external to them] making them so. The feelings that come about in things are thus manifested in sounds, and these corresponding sounds give birth to changes [amongst them]. These changes in sound are known as [musical] notations. Such variation in nodal tone, when combined together, gives [occasion for] the shield and axe, plume and ox-tail, and is what we call music. (*Liji*: 1074-81)

Thus, we can view Ji Kang's motive as not just a veiled attack on the institution of Confucian ethics but also as a call for liberation from the feudalistic enslavement of music in favour of a more natural representation of humans' emotional character. The question that arises, however, is how music is able to serve as the natural representation of human emotion if it is inherently devoid of emotion. To answer this, we shall investigate Ji Kang's own analysis of the relationship between music, sound, harmony, and nature.

4 The Relationship between Sound, Notation, and Music

While the argument presented in the *Yueji* chapter of the *Book of Rites* is based on principles of Confucian humanism, embodying music with the role of cultural reformer, many Chinese scholars take Ji Kang's treatise as being directed against the Han and Wei's conceptual confusion of the terms *sheng* 聲 (sound) and *yin* 音 (note), which can be discriminated by associating *sheng* 聲 with *sheng yin* 聲音 (musical tone/sound) and *yin* 音 with *yin yue* 音樂 (music). From this, one can go one step further and classify *Shenglun*'s use of the term *sheng* 聲 as: *sheng* 聲, *shengyin* 聲音, *yin* 音, *yinsheng* 音聲, whereby each term is a progression on the former, and of *sheng*'s overall characteristics (Wu 2006: 189).

Furthermore, we have thus far seen how *Shenglun* stresses the terms *sheng*, *yin*, and *yue*, and how Ji Kang's reference to sound is in fact epistemologically correct in taking sound to be the source of musical composition. Knowing that the source of music lies in sound, any attempt to push aside elements that are additional to it (for example, poetry, dance, and ritual) serves to reveal the essential character of music as being that which causes notes and musical accompaniment to revolve around sound in a manner that can be expressed as *sheng* 聲→*yin* 音→*yue* 樂, which would explain Ji Kang's tendency to view the production of sound as stemming from the natural world:

> When heaven and earth combined their virtues, the myriad things were borne and prospered. Cold and hot came and went in succession, and thus the five elements were created. These elements in turn expressed the five colors that were sent forth in accordance with the five sounds (tones). The creation of sound resembles the scents and odors found in the world. They are either good or bad, and whilst they may become mixed with other things, their essence remains intact. (Dai 1962: 197)

In tracing the source of sound to the natural world, Ji Kang is of the opinion that sound arises from the various transformations of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements, but that their inherent characteristics remain unchanged and are, therefore, immune to the problem of moral goodness, which we witness in the *Yueji*. In other words, sound arises and dissipates in accordance with the processes of the natural world. One may refer to a grouping of sounds as being musical if, and only if, their coalescence is deemed harmonious or chaotic. The reaction of the listener may only be in response to such types of sound, for sounds that are unrecognizable to the listener are merely dismissed as random, incoherent noise. However, as we shall see, even in a situation such as this, Ji Kang is still able to distinguish between sounds, notes, and music: "Thus, in all cases, the essential qualities [of sound] are either simple or complex, high or low, good or bad, while the emotional response of man is either agitation or quiescence, focused or scattered" (Dai 1962: 216). What this implies is that sound which occurs in the natural world possesses certain descriptive characteristics that are employed by mankind as a means of facilitating and mastering aural comprehension. Without the means by which sound can be captured and analysed, how is one able to compose music? This is precisely the point that Ji Kang is trying to make; natural sound cannot be captured or duplicated, for its essence eludes human comprehension in that it is a spontaneous manifestation of heaven: "Although sound may be fierce or tranquil, such fierceness and tranquillity share the same harmony, and that which is moved by harmony can be nothing but spontaneous" (Dai 1962: 217). On this point, Ji Kang not only reveals his affinity with the *Zhuangzi* but also his strong reluctance to immediately reject the more traditional view held in the *Yueji* that "music is a result of the harmony between heaven and earth…[and] from this harmony all things are transformed…[thus] music derives its movement from heaven while ritual takes after the form of earth" (*Liji*:

1090). Thus, Ji Kang states that, for music to be deemed as such, it must not be accompanied by something else, be it poetry, dance, or song, such that all that exists is the potentiality of music, a harmonious collection of sounds and notes lacking moral legitimacy.

The relationship Ji Kang seeks between sound and human emotion is one of autonomy; in not being susceptible to the realm of human politics or social influence, sound becomes a subject of the human mind such that it overcomes the enveloping restrictions of one's social environment, enabling it to gain its own independent destiny. It does so through a mechanism not of the mind but of the quality of the music as being either good or bad: "The essence of sound is nothing other than soothing or fast-paced, while the emotional response to sound is limited to either agitation or quietude" (Dai 1962: 216), and "since sound itself takes as its essence the qualities of good or bad, it can have no relation to grief or joy" (Dai 1962: 200). These qualities—good and bad, simple and complex, high and low, unhurried and intense—are not to be taken as measures of virtue but as categories of sound which are either harmonious or disharmonious. They become representative of the degree of harmony with the universe, *yin* and *yang*, and the five elements. Through this structuring of the tonal properties of music, the musical aesthetics of Ji Kang not only attempts to align itself with that of the *Zhuangzi*, but also attempts to personify its universalism by equating harmony with *dao* and music with nature.

In the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (*qiwulun* 齊物論), we are exposed to the notion of a human, earthly, and heavenly piping (*ren lai* 人籟, *di lai* 地籟, and *tian lai* 天籟). This is raised in a conversation between Ziyou and Ziqi, in which Ziyou asks about the piping of heaven to which Ziqi replies: "When the wind blows, the myriad apertures give off different sounds…[and yet]…they stop of themselves" (see Guo 1990: 43–50). This notion serves to nullify the Confucian understanding of music as being the result of human manufacturing, for it is the breath of heaven that gives rise to the sounds of the earth and the stoppage of such heavenly breathing causes the apertures of the earth to become empty and quiet. What is more, Zhuangzi's appropriation of heavenly piping is not to limit it to the spiritual realm or to explicate the origin of sound but rather to demonstrate the inherent nature of sound as being spontaneous and self-determining. Thus, for Zhuangzi, the various pipings of the universe exist in differing ontological states, but what is common to them all is their ability to be recognised by the sage and this is why Ji Kang states that only the sage is able to know of Perfect Harmony (*zhi he* 至和) for it is the harmony of *dao*.

Knowing *dao*, one is thus able to rid oneself of subjectively discriminating between human and earthly piping, for one has come to the realization that all forms of verbal expression are in fact naturally occurring; hence, the resonating sounds in the mind that we deem to be musical are in fact ethereal, being nothing more than manifestations of heavenly piping. As for why this is so, Ji Kang says that the essence of music lies in harmony and not in the mind (they are not exclusive of one another, however); the music produced by a performer is not representative of the state of mind of the listener, for only harmony can release the emotional condition of the listener. What Ji Kang seems to be implying, then, is that music's affective and effective forces are one and the same thing; it is the degree of harmony in the listener that determines their apparent distinctiveness. For the listener who has yet to attain Perfect Harmony, there is no co-resonance or partaking in the rhythmic resonance of genuine music, for only when one has attained harmony on a cosmic level can one's identity as an individual be forgotten, thus enabling one to know the mind of the performer.[20] This is why Ji Kang states that

[20] This is a reference to the sage, who is not prone to distinctions of effect and affect, for he lives at a level of awareness and integration with the world that surpasses anything the common person is capable of.

the mind and music [being produced by it] are quite clearly two separate things. Seeing as they are indeed this way, one who wishes to know the feelings of another does not spend time looking at his appearance; in gauging another's mind one does not rely upon hearing the music [created by him]. The examiner who wishes to know the mind by means of the music, how can he not be wide of the mark? (Dai 1962: 214).

Following, thus, in the steps of Zhuangzi, Ji Kang takes sound as the governor of musical notes and music, thereby peeling away from music its traditionally associated layers of emotion and virtue, together with its perceived attachment to beauty, in a manner reminiscent of the workings of heavenly piping: "[The apertures between these trees] resemble noses, mouths, ears, a pillar's support, a goblet, mortar, a puddle, and a pool. [The sounds flaring off them] resemble the sounds of rapidly flowing water, arrowheads flying, the shouts of men, fine breaths, great shouts, howls of sorrow; some are deep, others small" (Guo 1990: 46). To this description, Ji Kang adds the qualities of good and bad, simple and complex, high and low, unhurried and intense, whose procreation and unification occurs under the guise of harmony or nature.

As we have established, Ji Kang's delimitation of sound 聲, notes 音, and music 樂 is not a confounding of sound, *yinsheng* 音聲, and music, *yinyue* 音樂, but is an operation that centers upon a mutual sharing of the term *yin* 音, a phenomenon not uncommon to the writing style employed by many of his contemporaries. Such free appropriation of similar terminology is what seems to have misled many early interpreters of *Shenglun* to conclude that *sheng* 聲 both points to sound, *yinsheng* 音聲, and music, *yinyue* 音樂, with no seeming way to differentiate between them. Thus, the problem becomes a matter of distinguishing their formal usage from that which is functional.

Throughout *Shenglun*, the term *yin sheng* 音聲 is used nine times, and upon examining such occurrences, it would appear that they point to the modern sense of music, namely the connotation of *yin* 音. Also within the text, one discovers that the pairing of *sheng* 聲 and *yin* 音 occurs twenty-eight times, but such pairing should not be understood in the modern sense of the singular term *shengyin* 聲音 but as the conjoining of *yin* 音 and *sheng* 聲. Why should we interpret them in such a manner? First, with the singular term *yinsheng* 音聲, one can see throughout its usage that it frequently occurs with another responsive phrase, for example: "Arriving at A and B in sequence, the sounds and tones shall be in harmony" (Dai 1962: 197),[21] or "one should not refer to the issuance of grief and joy at the hands of music as being similar to the creation of love and hate at the hands of worthiness and stupidity" (Dai 1962: 204), or, again, "one who wishes to know the feelings of another does not spend time looking at his appearance; in gauging another's mind one does not rely upon hearing the music [created by him]" (Dai 1962: 214).

Additionally, the character *sheng* 聲 points to musical sounds (*sheng xiang* 聲響) confirming the idea that musical sounds are a form of music (*yin yue* 音樂), but music is devoid of human emotion. When it comes to the character *yue* 樂, we do not see a term exclusive of *sheng* and *yin*, but one that is referentially inclusive. Throughout the *Shenglun*, Ji Kang makes use of *yue* in a manner that refers to particular kinds of "ceremonial music" (*ya yue* 雅樂), for example: "For improving customs and traditions, nothing is more appropriate than music" (Dai 1962: 220); and "for feasts at court and social functions, the finest of music must be present" (Dai 1962: 224). The purpose in citing these applications

[21] These are references to the five notes of the ancient Chinese tonal scale, whereby *gong* 宫 corresponds to 1 in numbered musical notation, and *shang* 商 corresponds to 2.

of music is to show precisely that music can possess other social functions in addition to its traditionally ascribed role in ceremony. This tendency to view music as more than ritual accompaniment can also be found in Ruan Ji's 阮籍 treatise on music, the *Yue Lun* 樂論.

In Ji Kang's opinion, music is the catharsis for emotional release, not its bearer. As for the difference in regional music discussed earlier, we can see the influence of Zhuangzi's relativism present: "The customs of the various regions differ widely; singing and crying are not the same. If we erroneously confuse their use, some will hear crying and feel joy; some will listen to singing and feel sorrow. However, the emotions of grief and joy are the same. Now in using emotions that are the same to express sounds that are different, is this not due to music having no constancy?" (Dai 1962: 198). The point of contention for Ji Kang lies in the long-standing perception that music functions as an external indicator for one's inward disposition. Saying such an understanding is flawed implies that "any sayings and all records of the past [regarding music] will need to be thrown away; they are of no further use" (Dai 1962: 209). Thus, the link between the mind and outward expression becomes a non-viable means for social reform (via ritual) or as an expression of one's etiquette (*li* 禮). Music lacks constancy, Ji Kang argues, due to the inherent relationship between sound and notes being a tenuous one at best; notes give expression to the form of music, but as a formalistic expression, music is itself entirely lacking in emotional content. The entire cultural heritage attributed to music by the Confucians is a fraud, says Ji Kang, for how could musical pieces created during the Zhou 周 remain ethically relevant during the Wei 魏? The fact is that they cannot, for musical reproduction is a hollow act that fails to capture the spontaneous creativity of its composer and so cannot be used as a measure of his emotional state of mind. Although sound is expressed in the aesthetic form of notes, and notes are formalised in music, music cannot achieve its intended goal of emotional catharsis unless harmony amongst its sounds and notes is achieved. It is for this reason that Ji Kang makes the claim that music cannot in and of itself embody the emotions of grief and joy.

The motivation for writing *Sound is without Grief or Joy* was to point out the individual connotations and particular functions of sounds, notes, and music. Although Ji Kang's style of writing can be said to be the source for much of the apparent confusion over how to interpret each of these three terms, he does not violate the respective definitions of sound and notes, hence his need for the distinction between musical sound and music. However, in order not to contradict himself, Ji Kang allows the Host to make the following observation:

> With the lute, zither, and flute, the interval [between notes] is short, and the sound is high, having many changes and a rapid rhythm. With high notes driving a rapid rhythm, the body will become restless and the will strained…. With the *qin* and *se*, the interval [between notes] is long and the sound is low, having little change [in rhythm] and a sound that is clear. With low notes demanding few changes, not emptying one's mind in order to listen in quietude, one will be unable to reach the limits of purity and harmony, allowing the body to become quiet and the mind idle. (Dai 1962: 215)

The reference to "intervals are short/long, and the sound is high/low" can be nothing more than a description of the notes themselves and should not be applied to the music that is derived from them. However, what needs to be said is that, in addition to its musical connotation, *yue* 樂, when looked at from the essential thought of society, would appear to be not referring to the *le* 樂 (joy) used in the title of Ji Kang's treatise (*aile* 哀樂) but is making use of *le*'s homonym, *yue* 樂, as a means of pointing out the emotional movement contained within musical notes, *yin* 音. It would seem, then, that music is dependent upon

the operation of its notes while the same cannot be said for sound, whose motion is independent of the resultant musical outcome. Indeed, if we wished to further this line of reasoning, one could even argue that music is not comprised of sound at all, for if we are to follow the logic of Zhuangzi, all sounds are a form of natural music (breath) whose notation and composition lies beyond the comprehensive capacity of the human mind.

5 Psychological Sensibilities of Sound

Ji Kang believes that the five tones (*wu yin* 五音) came into being through the natural realm of heaven and earth and that there is one unchanging essence. But what is borne of this unchanging essence? At the start of *Sheng wu Aile Lun*, Ji Kang only mentions that sound is either good or bad, that sound can only take as its essence the qualities of good or bad, but he does not go on to explain what is meant by this. He does, however, spend considerable time discussing the relationship of sound and harmony, and it is this so-called "goodness" of sound that serves as the basis of harmony; harmony in turn forms the essential nature of sound. As the primary function of music is to provide humanity with the means through which emotions can be released, the relevance of the mind cannot be ignored. Indeed, Ji Kang has the following to say of the mind: "[When it comes to] the essence of music, the mind is given priority. Thus, music that is without sound is the father and mother of the people" (Dai 1962: 223).[22]

All told, the character *he* 和 singularly appears twelve times and in combination roughly forty times, but of these only twenty-nine mean harmony. Of these twenty-nine examples, only four are used as the term presence of mind (*ping he* 平和), while eight are used as the term harmonious sound (*he sheng* 和聲). What is more, Ji Kang differentiates harmony into three different stratum: a harmony (*he* 和) that is grounded in the mind, a Great Harmony (*da/tai he* 大/太和), which transcends the mind yet is still of the human realm, and a Perfect Harmony (*zhu/zhi he* 主/至和), which transcends the human world altogether to become the cosmological harmony of all things, similar to the *dao* seen in the *Zhuangzi*.

The good and bad qualities of sound can be directly correlated with the idea of music being beautiful or ugly; an aesthetic judgement whose origin lies not in the ethical capacity of the mind, but rather as a literal descriptive of sound itself: "With regards to the five colors, they are either pleasant or ugly; regarding the five tones, they are either good or bad. This is the nature of things" (Dai 1962: 204). Sounds whose natural harmony results in soothing, graceful music tends to be thought of as good, while those sounds which are discordant and harsh tend be considered bad. In other words, it is the quality of the sound itself, as a combination of notes that are themselves harmonious, that ends up superseding the resultant musical production. Thus, Ji Kang comments: "The five tastes have myriad different possibilities, but they share a great union in the commonness of beauty; the variations of a song may be many but share a great union in the commonness of their harmony…. Where harmony is felt, sounds will spontaneously express themselves" (Dai 1962: 216–17). The logic why it is that sounds are able to impact people emotionally, either to a state of joy or sorrow, and thereby thought of as being either good or bad, is that it is

[22] The commentary on this line reads: "In the Xian Ju chapter on Confucius in the *Liji* it says: 'Confucius said: The father and mother of the people must reach the source of ritual and music so as to deliver the five perfections and the three withouts: music without sound, ritual without form, and mourning without dress.'" Returning to the source that is perfection and nothingness is to return to *dao*. Perfect Music, therefore, embodies Perfect Harmony and both require a receptive mind to achieve this end, hence the so-called priority of mind.

sound itself which propagates the essence of the natural realm in the form of harmony. Music, therefore, is not only derived from the natural harmonization of sound, it also serves as the medium through which such harmonization can be realized.

From the above analysis, it becomes clear why Ji Kang claims that "music has a natural harmony and is unrelated to human emotions…. Sounds of Perfect Harmony come from the pipes and strings" (Dai 1962: 208). Sounds, then, are manifested in three stages: As undifferentiated sounds of nature, as the differentiated sounds of humans found in metal and stone, and as the cosmic sounds of harmony that can only be expressed through pipes and strings. Such progression of sound serves not only as an aesthetic statement but also as an ethical rendering of such aesthetics, a hint, perhaps, of the difficult situation in which Ji Kang found himself: wanting to reduce Confucian influence over the musical spectrum to a bare minimum, yet at the same time not wishing to dismiss the entire Confucian tradition. Perhaps this is why Ji Kang never fully denies the human involvement in musical production, for music created without the human hand would be nothing other than natural sounds and hence could not be deemed morally worthy according to the envisioning of music found in the *Book of Rites*.

As the harmonic quality of music is a naturally occurring phenomenon, and given that music for Ji Kang is devoid of emotion, to what is harmony referring if the ethical element is unavailable? Upon closer examination of the text, the following aspects of harmony can be used to judge its level of metaphysical development: the degree of restraint and concordance of sounds (*ke xie* 克諧), the level of harmonizing arrangement of sounds (*he bi* 和比), the amount of presence of mind and harmony amongst the sounds (*ping he* 平和), all of which point to the integrity and deliverance (*yizhi*一致), or rather, the harmonious proportion (*tiaoxie* 調諧) or reconciliation (*hexie* 和諧) of sounds within a musical composition. The higher the level of integration of these various elements, the closer to attaining a Great or Perfect Harmony the piece of music will achieve. However, we must keep in mind that for Ji Kang music is an entirely subjective experience. It is the listener that superimposes his/her emotional condition onto a piece of music, which is capable of neither possessing nor transmitting the emotions of grief or joy. Music is deemed either good or bad solely on its harmonic integrity. It was not for lack of harmony that the music of Zheng was regarded as being bad but because it was deemed morally lewd—an argument Ji Kang dismissed, calling the music of Zheng "the most wonderful among sounds" precisely because of the subjective nature of musical preference.

As harmonious sound serves as a catharsis for emotional release without embodying such emotions themselves, the question then becomes: are all manifestations of sound capable of acting as an emotional catharsis? For Ji Kang, the answer is no. Sounds that are shrill and quick tempered serve to agitate human minds, while lower-pitched, more melodic sounds such as those produced by the *qin* or *se* are preferred: "With high notes driving a rapid rhythm, the body will become restless and the will strained…with low notes demanding few changes, not emptying one's mind in order to listen in quietude, one will be unable to reach the limits of purity and harmony, allowing the body to become quiet and the mind idle" (Dai 1962: 215). Could this be why Ji Kang himself preferred to play the *qin* rather than the lute? If he were truly attempting to emulate the kind of naturalism we see in the *Zhuangzi*, he would not be so quick to display such preferential treatment of one musical instrument over another. For Zhuangzi, all forms of naturally occurring sound are manifestations of *dao* and are favoured over human-made music (and even human speech for that matter), precisely because they have nothing to declare; they manifest in a myriad different ways and take their leave just as spontaneously. The disposition of human music is otherwise; there exists a predisposition toward completion, a completion that is temporally

regulated and spatially structured. Hence, the music of Zheng was deemed bad precisely because of its divergence from the ethical norm of music.[23]

To be expressed in a harmonious way is just one aspect of musical appreciation for Ji Kang. Granted, sounds of harmony have the affective ability to bring out an emotional response in the subject, but if such a listener is uneducated in or not attuned to the way of musical harmony, would not such perfection be falling on deaf ears? Thus, the listener must be receptive not only to his/her own subjective interpretation (good or bad) but also to the degree of nodal harmonics. This is where he brings discussion of the mind into the equation, calling for a union of mind-heart-soul through which one's bodily existence becomes united with the harmony of the music being played.[24] Through such union, the listener is able to achieve clarity of mind and soul from which a letting out of emotions takes place: "Therefore, sounds in harmony and order are what move human hearts most deeply" (Dai 1962: 198).

The unity that is able to occur between the mind of the skilled listener and music is, of course, a psychological union, but such a union is possible only because harmonious sound lacks any sense of permanence or constancy of expression. This is what makes possible the distinction between "ritualistic" music (as found in the *Yueji*) and "naturalistic" music, the latter being the only one capable of expressing its inherent harmony and ethical neutrality. Sounds of nature or those that have achieved harmony are also impermanent, and, being so, they are in themselves not indicative of anything in particular but only express their essential nature, as it exists. Lacking constancy, harmonious sounds become much like the mirror metaphor we see used in Daoism; reflecting what is presented without retaining anything for itself. This is a most revolutionary idea of Ji Kang's, questioning the very moral foundation upon which traditional Confucian interpreters of music stood. The implications of such an idea must have unsettled many, but for Ji Kang, a deep admirer of Zhuangzi, such a naturalistic rendering of the world was completely justifiable. Calling the songs or music of the southern states (such as Zheng and Chu) beautiful was not an ethical judgement but an aesthetic one. Whether or not the music of the southern states was more beautiful than that of the north is irrelevant; Ji Kang was merely interested in the question of form rather than content. Hence, to claim that natural or harmonious sounds are beautiful is to say that they are beautiful formally, yet, as Ji Kang points out, even their form is without constancy (*hesheng wu xiang* 和聲無象).

The obvious counter to the claim that one particular piece of music will instil different reactions in people becomes a question of individual reception and reaction to such music. This is because Ji Kang took each individual's reception to a particular musical experience as being uniquely different. This is due to each listener being laden with a predisposed emotional inclination, which either conforms to the feelings brought about in the process of listening (thus relieving the listener of such emotions), or that counters it, thereby leaving the listener's emotional state unchanged: "Plucking strings in a banquet hall, both joy and sorrow will result, and this is clearly due to Perfect Harmony having released blocked emotions and guided one's feelings. Therefore, through the arousal of external things, one can exhaust one's inner self" (Dai 1962: 218). In this way, one's emotional sensations can be transformed into a sensation of beauty, an aesthetic experience sought after in many of the texts written during and after Ji Kang's time. As the first text concerned with the

[23] See the following stories in the *Zhuangzi* (Guo 1990: 31; 37) of men from Song who made things (ceremonial caps, hand salve) that, when taken out of their original context, became either useless (caps) or useful (salve).

[24] Such union of spirit-mind-body is reminiscent of Cook Ding's butchery in Chapter 3 of the *Zhuangzi*.

aesthetic form of music, JI Kang's *Sheng wu Aile Lun* set the tone for future investigations into the presentation of musical thought and stirred a rousing debate regarding the ethical overtones traditionally thought to be associated with music as a performance art. In this regard, he was certainly more in line with the Daoist conception of sound and speech; however, one cannot overlook the fact that given the historical situation of the Wei-Jin period, and lingering support for the Han acceptance of music (specifically sad music) as accompaniment to the rites, and hence, a conduit for moral reform, one can see why thinkers such as JI Kang would go to such lengths to argue for the moral neutrality of music as a mode of social reform and great individual freedom.

6 Conclusion

To say that JI Kang simply re-read the *Liji* through the naturalism discussed in the *Zhuangzi* would be a gross misinterpretation of the text. While similarities between them abound, JI Kang's reinterpretation of Confucian texts in a neo-Daoist vein surely served a higher purpose. Taking advantage of concepts developed by his predecessors, JI Kang made abundant use of notions of non-Being, nature, harmony, and spirit to arrive at a new way, in which one could explain the workings of *yin* and *yang*, the primordial *qi*, and other cosmological elements used by the Confucians, to explain the operation of the natural ordering of the universe. As he was a musician and theorist, it should come as no surprise that he would attempt to formulate a new theory for the structuring and creation of such natural phenomenon. In this regard, his writing distinguishes itself from that of HE Yan and WANG Bi and even from his mentor and source of inspiration, Zhuangzi.

To claim that music is incapable of conveying human emotions would have amounted to heresy in JI Kang's time, and indeed his bold statements and disrespect for Confucius would earn him the enmity of the Sima clan and ultimately cost him his life.[25] While his other writings also deal with musical theory and self-cultivation, it was *Shenglun* that received the most attention and criticism from scholars. If we can come away from reading this treatise with one thing, it would be this: music, at its core, is merely a label assigned by humanity, when in fact it should be seen for what it really is—an ensemble of naturally occurring sounds whose rhythm and harmony follows the spontaneous nature of the object producing it. To claim, as the Confucians did, that music carries human emotions would be to anthropomorphize it, which is why JI Kang claimed that sound is devoid of emotion, but when such sound attains a sufficient level of harmonization and aesthetic pleasantry, it may act as a catharsis for the emotional release of the listener. Living in the transitional period between WANG Bi's "Treasuring Nothingness" (*guiwu lun* 貴無論) and PEI Wei's "Treasuring Existence" (*chongyou lun* 崇有論), JI Kang's musical approach and unique writing style are both surprising and philosophically engaging. That the tumultuous Wei-Jin period took so many great minds before their time was a loss of such profound creativity and expressive originality that it makes the works of one like JI Kang all the more precious and deserving of further academic discussion.

[25] Although JI Kang's death was unfortunate, it is clear that his arrogance and flippancy played a major role in bringing about the downfall of the Cao family (JI Kang was, after all, married to CAO Cao's granddaughter, sworn enemies of the Sima clan) and his clique of drunken misfit intellectuals, known as the "seven sages of the bamboo grove 竹林七賢." See Xu 1991: 688–89; and Xu 2004: 1116–1121.

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